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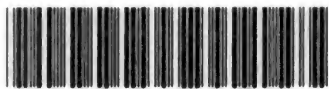
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AN ASCENT  
OF  
MONT BLANC.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THESE pages contain the narrative of an ascent of Mont Blanc, made in August, 1855, by a new route, and without guides. It has been thrown together by two or three members of the party from notes made at the time, and from recollection; it is therefore hoped that without examining with too critical an eye either the composition or the arrangement of the subject, the reader will regard the novelty of the undertaking, and its successful termination, as possessing some claims on his attention.

A small portion of the accompanying map has been filled in from that published by the Sardinian Government; it is, however, prin-

cipally taken from the survey which Professor Forbes made when in Chamouni, and which he has attached to his work on the Alps of Savoy. This compilation, although drawn from authentic sources, makes no pretensions to perfect accuracy, but is introduced in order to render the descriptive details more intelligible, and to point out to future travellers the general direction of the route to be pursued.

## PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

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WE are unwilling to place the following narrative of an ascent of Mont Blanc in the hands of the public unaccompanied by a brief reply to anticipated objections. Some of our friends have already asserted that this field of scientific research has been exhausted. They blame us for having risked our own lives in an enterprise without aim or purpose, and for now holding out to others any inducement to tread in our footsteps ; and they jestingly intimate that we must be prepared to defend ourselves in the Criminal Court against a charge of manslaughter.

In attempting the ascent, we were simply actuated by love of adventure, by the hope of breaking through the exclusive Chamounix

system\*, and by the desire of making ourselves familiar with the beauty and topography of the Alpine regions. We went abroad for recreation: it was pleasure that we sought; and we gave but little thought to useful discovery. True it is, that the pleasure was of a noble and an elevating character; true also, that when novel facts came in our way, they were not neglected; true, that when observations could be made with the instruments which we occasionally carried, they were recorded. Regarding, then, these mountain excursions as a temporary relief from arduous duties or indoor confinement, and contrasting them with other amusements pursued with the same end in view, what is the result? With regard to danger, at what conclusion do we arrive?

How many are there who, scarcely able either to pull or swim a stroke, attempt to manage a light racing craft, and pay the fatal

\* See note at the end.

penalty of their fool-hardiness? Let Thames and Severn answer. How many are there who, hardly knowing the difference between a hack and a hunter, break a limb or lose their life in the ardour of the chase? Let Oxfordshire and Leicester tell the tale. How many are there who, ignorant of woodcraft, hasten forth in September and October, and become victims of carelessness and inexperience? Let the English woods and Scottish moors reply.

But who repeats in tones of sorrow the name of friend or relative that has perished amid the solitudes of the higher Alps? The Jung Frau's spotless snows, the crested summits of the Wetter Hörner, Montè Rosa's craggy peaks, are all guiltless of the traveller's blood. These, and many other lofty pinnacles of Switzerland, have welcomed the adventurous mountaineer; and death or severe accident is unknown. The loss of three guides when Dr. Hamel made the ascent of Mont Blanc is almost the only instance; and this accident, together with perhaps one other,

were, it is more than probable, caused by the absence of sufficient precaution.

Such is the general view. Let us now say a few words relative to our own particular position. We all had perfect confidence in each other; we had had more than ordinary experience in mountain difficulties; we had all crossed glacier passes without guides; and we had made some of the more difficult ascents. We had erected a stone memorial upon the Petit Mont Cervin; we had scaled the Breit-Horn's icy ridge; and the majority of our party could say that they had climbed the eastern extremity of the Pennine chain, that they were the first and only explorers who had gained the very highest peak of its three-forked summit, that they had looked down upon the valleys beneath from Monte Rosa's Aller-höchste-Spitze. By examining maps and models, we had made ourselves as nearly masters of the route as possible; continued training had put us into capital condition, so that we could have sustained very

prolonged exertion; and we *knew* the nature of the difficulties to be overcome, and were consequently enabled to guard against danger. It was after this preparation that we started upon our enterprise; and we maintain that the risk of serious accident was but little greater than that incurred by the pedestrian in the streets of London.

It is almost unnecessary here to explain the spirit with which these remarks have been written; for, although apparently of a somewhat boastful character, surely not one of our readers would misconstrue our motive. We seek not to parade our excursions; but we enumerate some of them, first, with the view of justifying our selves against those censors who, by accusing us of rashness, while they are themselves ignorant of the truth, fairly lay themselves open to a precisely similar charge; and, secondly, with the intention of warning all who would undertake these difficult excursions against engaging in them too hastily, lest they meet with serious accident.

What, then, is the motive that induces us to publish this account? Not the novelty of the subject; for Mont Blanc has been the theme of every form of volume recognised by the guild of publishers, of nearly every title that the ingenuity of a writer could suggest. We might instance the light brochure of Albert Smith, the pleasing narrative of Ion's gifted author, and the scientific researches of the Scottish Forbes; or we might draw from their dusky shelves the more ponderous tomes of Humboldt, of De Saussure and of Schlaglenweit.

Can we, then, hope to find a vacant space amid these serried ranks? May we add yet another drop to that mountain cup of knowledge, which is about to overflow? The knapsack of Alpine lore is closing; and can we venture to assert that they who pack it leave one small corner still unoccupied?

We do not attempt to trespass upon ground already trodden. We do not enter the field as competitors with those who regard these regions with the eye of an artist, of a philo-



sopher, or of a naturalist. But the ascent of this monarch of mountains gave us unbounded gratification ; and this it is that we seek to place within the reach of all who like ourselves are inclined to say,

“Fain would I climb, but that I fear to *pay*.”

Dare we then associate together some of nature’s grandest scenes and degrading thoughts of sordid mammon ? The mind recoils from the incongruity. That there is, however, but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, is an axiom, and one not limited to the British Isles ; for when Mont Blanc’s snow-clad summit first greets the youthful traveller, an irresistible impulse urges him to scale the glorious mountain and explore its hidden wonders ; but ere his thoughts find utterance, there comes a cruel, killing frost, that blights his new-born hopes, and, for the shout of exultation just bursting from his lips, he whispers in faltering tones, “How much will be the cost ?” or, “Will the governor pay ?”

To the first of these questions, there has hitherto existed but one nearly stereotyped reply ; for, as all the world knows, the expense of an ascent from Chamounix amounts to nearly thirty pounds for each traveller — an expense that cannot be avoided, and one that debars many an enthusiastic mountaineer from a great and glorious pleasure, a pleasure characterised by Professor Forbes as one beyond and without a name. If, however, the ascent be made from St. Gervais, the traveller is at liberty to select his own guides, to determine for himself the number that he requires, or, if so inclined, to dispense with them altogether; and in that case the expense would be about twenty shillings.

Two young men from Trinity College, Dublin, whom we afterwards met at Geneva last summer, followed our route; and the Chasseurs who accompanied them were well pleased to receive eight pounds for their services. One of these gentlemen failed in consequence of illness ; but the other easily reached the sum-

mit, and afterwards returned to St. Gervais.\* If those who are contented with a limited number of guides are enabled to travel in his footsteps, or if some more daring cragsmen enter upon these vast glacier fields with no other companionship than that of their own bold spirits — if any such derive assistance from the following pages, then will the object with which they were penned have been accomplished.

Pluck and determination, though indispensable requisites, are, however, insufficient to ensure success. The party who make this attempt without guides, should consist of at least five members; they should be known to each other, and provided with proper implements; they should all be familiar with glaciers, skilled in overcoming the obstacles which these present, and accustomed to rely upon their own resources in seasons of difficulty.

Yet with all these essentials at command,

\* See note at the end.

failure is by no means impossible. But let not the ardent lover of mountain adventure despair; let him bear his first repulse with patience, and boldly make another trial. We believe that all such spirits must be good fellows; and we heartily wish them a triumphant reward to their labours, whether the scene of these be laid in hill or in dale, in high places or in low, in England or in foreign climes; and in bringing these observations to a conclusion, we beg them to remember that

“ Our doubts are traitors,  
And make us lose the good we oft might win  
By fearing to attempt.”

Caius College,  
March, 1856.











AN

## ASCENT OF MONT BLANC.

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AFTER exploring the glaciers and passes in the neighbourhood of Monte Rosa and Mont Combin, we re-united our forces early in August 1855, at the head of the Val d'Aosta. In our social little band of mountaineers, the clerical body was worthily represented by Charles Hudson and by Grenville and Christopher Smyth; the architectural skill of Charles Ainslie was temporarily diverted from English schools and churches, to the rude cheese chalets of Piedmont and Savoy; while E. J. Stevenson and E. S. Kennedy, having torn themselves away from Alma Mater and the Caius boat, exchanged the Senate-house for Italian skies, and the placid bosom of the

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Cam for the ice-fed torrents of the Dora and the Arveiron. Our steps now led us to Courmayeur; and there we heard that Mr. Ramsay of Christ Church, Oxford, had, in the company of six guides, ascended the Col du Géant, and that he had thence succeeded in gaining a point but an hour distant from the summit of Mont Blanc; we indulged, therefore, the hope of enjoying an ascent without being obliged to submit to the unreasonable demands that are made upon travellers at Chamounix. As the system established at that place in reference to guides may not be generally known, it should be mentioned that all persons residing at Chamounix, who are desirous of becoming guides, pass a certain examination, and then their names are enrolled. The traveller who wishes to make an excursion, must apply to the guide-chef, who supplies him with the number of guides determined upon by tariff, and in each case these guides must be taken in rotation as their names stand on the list. The evils attendant on this arrangement are twofold, first, as they relate to travellers, secondly, as they affect the guides themselves. No inducement for exertion or self-improvement is held out to the guide who is desirous of dis-

tinguishing his name from that of his fellows, while, on the other hand, the traveller bent upon exploring the more difficult regions of this Alpine chain, is often compelled to accept as guides, men competent only to escort the dilettante tourist to the giddy heights of the Montan Vert, or to carry a lady's shawl to the dangerous pinnacle of the Flegère. It is not long since a friend of ours ascended Mont Blanc from Chamounix, with two other gentlemen, when six of their guides, to each of whom they were obliged to give 100 francs, had never been up the mountain; while upon another occasion, two or three of the number forced upon the travellers, were unable to proceed further than the Grand Plateau, and our friend reached the summit without receiving the assistance for which he had paid so high a sum. There are, however, at Chamounix fine sturdy fellows whose intrepidity and skill have justly been the theme of admiration, and it is upon those men that the arbitrary laws press with severity and injustice. Victor Tairraz, a guide, who has taught himself English, and is a first-rate mountaineer, complains bitterly that he derives no advantage

from his perseverance and superior education. At Chamounix he who is at home among the snow and glaciers, and he who is unable to pass the threshold of difficulty, are placed alike on the same level. In a country where the face of nature presents an irregularity at once so grand and so attractive, the folly or cupidity of man have attempted to establish the law of perfect equality.

There has been lately a destructive fire at Chamounix. A member of our party left a cheque for the sufferers, on condition that it should remain untouched until an English traveller should be at liberty to choose his own guide, and to determine for himself the number he required.

Upon making inquiries at Courmayeur, however, we found, to our surprise and disappointment, that two men had already gone thence to Chamounix in order to concert measures, that a corps de guides was in the course of formation, and that the answer to our question as to the sum they demanded was, "Le prix de Chamounix." This answer we received from men who had never reached the summit, who had made no preparation for

sleeping in the mountain at night, similar to the accommodation at the Grands Mulets; from men, too, most of whom had, in the ascent with Mr. Ramsay, given up from sheer want of pluck and determination. Upon a further acquaintance with these men, we found the general opinion verified in them, that the coward is a braggart and a bully. It is they who form the party of the guides. Upon the other hand, there are the chamois hunters, industrious men who gain a precarious livelihood by the chase, with several of whom we became acquainted through the kindness of Mr. Hamilton, an English gentleman at present residing with his family at Courmayeur. The following are the names of two employed by us: Pierre Mochet and Gratien Bareng. These hunters had accompanied Mr. Ramsay, and we mention their names in order that they may be sought out by travellers as men whom the guide-party wish to exclude, except upon their own terms, from employment, although in all necessary qualifications by far their superiors. The severe and ill-paid nature of their occupation may be gathered from the fact that while we were there one of them

brought home as the result of two days' continuous hunting a remarkably fine chamois, for which, including its skin, horns, &c., he only obtained fifteen francs.

With these chamois hunters we made a satisfactory arrangement to try the ascent of Mont Blanc ; little time, however, had elapsed before one of them returned saying, with evident symptoms of regret, that they must decline. The guides had threatened them, and they knew the character of their countrymen too well not to be aware that if they accompanied us, their lives would be in danger. Mr. Hamilton, who has resided some years in Piedmont, did not hesitate to express his opinion that their fears were too well founded. Of course we could not think for one moment of urging them to accompany us under these circumstances: it was the first time such Italian feelings had been brought so closely home to us; we felt pity for the poor hunters, and sought to frustrate the manœuvre of the guides; while we determined that the position and character of each party should be made known to future English travellers.

Our excitement was now upon the increase: we had before us, not only the difficulty of

surmounting the monarch of European mountains, but the petty opposition of a parcel of pitiful Italians had to be overcome. It was past nine at night, and all the preparations had to be made for an early start on the following morning. We were at this moment partaking of Mr. Hamilton's kind hospitality, who, with the ladies of his family, entered most warmly into the contest. His son, also, a young man strongly attached to mountain climbing, and evidently hand-in-hand with the chamois hunters, exerted himself strenuously in the cause; the guides were in hot debate at a neighbouring café, the chamois hunters were at a loss how to act, the whole town was on the *qui-vive*, and messengers were passing to and fro between the two parties. The demands of the guides became more outrageous: we were told that they insisted upon receiving 600 francs for each of the party, and required, also, to be furnished with provisions for two days. We asked the chamois hunters if they would undertake to obtain porters, who, with themselves, would carry provisions and other necessaries to the place at which we proposed to sleep. They

made the attempt, but the opposition of the guides was too formidable. At length they promised to obtain porters for a portion of this distance; but even the mere agreement to carry a traveller's luggage up a moderate height, without the consent of the self-constituted guide party, had the effect of again bringing before the hunters' mind visions of Italian rifle balls or stilettos. They, however, went out to make the necessary arrangements, and the guides, finding their threats were no longer effectual, had now recourse to bribes; and not only offered to pay them the sum we had agreed upon, but also promised to give them a dinner if they refused to accompany us; but the hunters said they had pledged their word, and we found to our satisfaction that they resisted both corruption and intimidation.

It was now getting late, and many were the preparations to be made before we dared seek our Italian couches. We knew that an early start on the morrow could be secured only by completing every arrangement over night, and that it was quite out of the question to leave any portion of our arrangements to others.



Each, therefore, took his share of the labour. While one presided at the pot, where innumerable eggs were boiling, and another superintended the packing of the sausages, the indefatigable Ainslie manufactured warm gloves out of a piece of cloth extracted from the stores of our hospitable entertainer; and ingeniously concocted a preparation of boiled bougies and olive oil, as an ointment to protect our faces from the sun. At length all was completed, and but little time left for the dreams of the morrow.

We left Courmayeur at 6.30 A.M. on Tuesday, Aug. 7th, possessing the respect of the inhabitants, and even of the guides (for we had so far gained the day), and encouraged by the good wishes of Mr. Hamilton and his family. We were, however, a little suspicious of our porters, seven in number, and therefore allowed them to precede us. They carried bread, meat, cheese, &c., together with our small tent brought from England by Grenville and Christopher Smyth, for photographic purposes, but occasionally found useful in expeditions which, like the present, involved the necessity of passing a

night in the mountains. The morning was very fine, and we rapidly ascended the precipitous steep which on this side leads to the "Col du Géant," reaching its summit about 12.30. Here we had some food at a height of 11,240 feet, and at a spot immediately adjoining the old cabin in which the energetic philosopher De Saussure, in the year 1788, spent seventeen days and nights pursuing scientific observations on the geology, natural history, and magnetism of the Higher Alps. His son, M. Theodore de Saussure, who accompanied him on that occasion, and shared his labours, is the only survivor of all who joined in that expedition. A few stones alone mark the place of his encampment. The sun's rays were powerful, and we obtained abundance of water by adopting the simple expedient of spreading snow upon faces of rocks that sloped towards the south, and placing cups to catch the drops as it melted. Not far from this spot are found numerous specimens of quartz crystals, and in the search for them we expended some time. At length, after a halt of about an hour and a-half, we dismissed our attendants, then shouldering the knap-

sacks and placing the heavier portion of our impedimenta across poles, we commenced our glacier march. It was an exciting moment, for though disposed to underrate rather than to magnify the difficulties before us, we were yet fully aware that our expedition could not be successfully carried out except with constant care and perseverance. It was by no means a novelty for us to find ourselves alone upon the high glaciers; yet all anxiety could not be banished; for we were more than usually loaded, we had in view a couple of nights' bivouacking in unknown regions, and above all we were striving to scale the monarch himself.

On leaving the Col, the rope which we used on all occasions of difficulty was attached to belts fastened round our waists, and we advanced single file. Nor was this precaution unnecessary, for following the directions which the chasseurs had given us before their departure from the Col, we endeavoured to skirt the northern angle of the peak of red granite called from its shape *La Tour Ronde*, when C. Smyth, who was at that moment in the van, slipped up to his middle through a treacherous

coating of drifted snow by which a deep crevasse running transversely to our line of march was concealed. Stevenson, who was the second in the line, by planting his alpenstock firmly in the snow, was able to keep the rope perfectly tight whilst the leader was extricating himself from his perilous position. This crevasse, extending all across the glacier and too wide to pass by ordinary means, seemed a bar to further progress in this direction. A council of war was held; and then, retracing our steps for a short distance, we skirted the eastern base of the Flambeau, thus selecting a higher, and, as it seemed, a preferable route to that taken by Mr. Ramsay. We next descended upon the upper portion of the Glacier du Tacul, with the intention of again slightly ascending to a spot contiguous to the Aiguille du Midi, where we had been told we should find rock upon which we might encamp. But as evening drew on, the clouds collected, and at the foot of the Rognon we called a halt. We had now been walking, heavily laden, for some hours, and for the greater part of the time ankle deep in snow. Thick mists were now around us; we therefore determined to

bivouac where we were, upon the open glacier. We selected a spot partially sheltered by the Rognon from the wind, which in violent gusts was now threatening us with a rough night. We at once pitched our tent and strengthened it by ropes attached to poles which we drove into the ice. A large waterproof was stretched out upon the soft surface of the snow within. A quilt being laid upon this, we calculated upon passing, with the help of our blankets, a tolerably pleasant night of it. But the even soft snow makes after all but an indifferent couch. The warmth of the tent causes the snow beneath to bind and conform itself to the shape of the body. We had no means of procuring water for our remarkably weak grog but by suspending a saucepan filled with snow from the roof of our tent, under which we held in turns a small spirit-lamp, an exercise which required the greatest patience. Our wet boots covered with snow, were suspended from our tent roof. As our appetites were in no way impaired by a ten hours' walk, a considerable onslaught was made upon the provision stores. We then wrapped ourselves up as well as we could in our blankets, and

coiled ourselves up for the night. Flap, flap, flap, went the sides of our canvass till we verily thought the next gust would carry off the tent, boots and all — and there we should be left in a pretty mess still disputing about the blankets. Difficult it is to sleep at any time when the mind is excited by past exertions or future hopes, but that difficulty is increased tenfold when our roof is the sky, our bed the snow, and when six men are crammed into a space adapted for three or four at the most. The time was enlivened by occasional conversations of this kind:—“Hollo, Stevenson, what are you at? don’t pinch my legs!” “Then please, old fellow,” would be the reply, “just have the goodness to take your foot off my face!”

Before daylight next morning we commenced preparations for breakfast, not however without having first cast many an anxious glance upon the prospect around. This was not of an encouraging character: we were surrounded by masses of vapour, through which at distant intervals a solitary star appeared. Knowing, however, that such clouds might at that height be either the precursors

of snow, or the harbingers of sunshine, we determined that if possible our past labour should not be entirely lost, and therefore proceeded upon our way. Our vision, except at rare intervals, was bounded at the distance of a few yards by the mists which rested upon the glacier-fields that we were now traversing. We were roped together to avoid accident. We scratched the surface with our poles to facilitate return. The leading man steered by compass, and in this order we advanced across unknown tracts of perpetual snow. At the end of little more than an hour the mists began to disperse; we were rewarded by some magnificent glimpses of the high mountains, and we found to our satisfaction that we had steered to a spot not fifty yards distant from our destination. We were now placed immediately between the bases of the Aiguille du Midi, and the Mont Blanc du Tacul, overlooking the Glacier des Bossons.

We had now a rather stiff climb of three hours in order to ascend the snow-slope, the steepest part of which is near the top, and which by accurate measurement made with our goniometer we found inclined at an angle

of 52 degrees. After passing, by means of a snow-bridge, a crevasse which crossed the slope at its steepest part, and in a longitudinal direction, our leading man proceeded a short distance further, and from the summit of Mont Blanc du Tacul he had a view of the Monts Maudits and of Mont Blanc. The summit of the Monts Maudits is divided into two peaks, and between these two, passes the route to Mont Blanc.

We were now within four hours of the object of our expedition, but in the meantime the wind had risen considerably, the clouds had again collected, from which fine snow was falling, and thick drifts of mist were driven rapidly past ; we therefore, after some discussion, determined that further perseverance would be rash. We then rapidly retraced our steps to the sleeping quarters, where we stretched our limbs for an hour or two on the waterproof, and then, having packed up our tent and the remaining provisions, we once more found ourselves homeward bound.

The march was exceedingly fatiguing, our burdens were cumbrous and weighty, the sun was beginning to exert considerable power,



and at every step we sank nearly knee-deep in the softened snow. Some of our party considered this to be the most trying excursion which they had as yet attempted. On the previous day we had encountered more than ordinary fatigues, and now, after an indifferent night and an early and arduous mountain climb, the labour told so severely upon those who were extra-weighted, that they were frequently compelled to drop upon the snow, in order to regain their wonted energy. One comfort, however, was still remaining: we had carefully preserved our last bottle of vin rouge; a bottle of no mean quality, which, like the regimental colours that renew the spirits of the drooping, was now carried in the van. This was our promised reward, the grateful cordial that should impart fresh energy, the elixir that none dare taste until the glacier march were concluded, and the summit of the Col du Géant attained. At length we are all in the wished-for haven, and grouped in close proximity to the ruins of old de Saussure's hut. A broad flat rock forms the table, in the centre of which conspicuously stands the solitary bottle. "Shall we open him at once,

or shall we wait a little?" "No, don't open him yet, let us first have some food." Accordingly, the choice viands are produced that coldly furnish forth our mountain meal; the rude slab of primeval granite groans again with the superincumbent mass,—the bread and butter, the diminutive poulets—the savoury sausage. These trifles are, however, subjected to unmerited neglect; a far greater attraction is exercising its spell; all eyes are intensely gazing upon the central flagon; the extraction of the cork is impatiently awaited,—the *gout* and the flavour,—the rich, racy, red wine,—the ruby tide that shall course through the arteries of the heart,—all are in imagination anticipated. In the exuberance of his spirits, and in the intense excitement of the moment, a distinguished member of our band begins at this crisis to dance for very ecstasy; the bottle falls with a hideous crash, and the promised land overflows with the juice of the grape. A dreadful pause ensues—it endures but a moment, for with eager haste we make little snow-balls, with which each of us mops up as much of the precious liquid as his ready-formed sponge

will collect. After this, we rapidly descended the Col du Géant, and reached Courmayeur in the evening.

We have every reason to believe that had the weather been propitious our enterprise would have been successful; one failure, however, did not deter us from another attempt at the glorious old monarch, neither did it dispirit us; for it was to St. Gervais we had been looking as the point which offered the fairest prospect of success. The trial from Courmayeur was only a little diversion by the way, and several of us had looked forward to mounting again from St. Gervais, even had we been able to gain the summit from the south side of the chain.

It was nearly dusk on the evening of Friday, August 10th, when our party separated at the little inn of Nant Bourant, which lies between the Col du Bonhomme and Contamines. Ainslie and Kennedy slept there, and kindly undertook to bring forward the tent in the morning. The rest of the party went forward to Contamines, partly to secure better quarters, and also to allow more time at St.

Gervais, to make preparations for a start on the following Monday morning.

About nine o'clock in the morning we were under weigh, in light marching order ; for we had engaged a man to carry our knapsacks to the Hotel du Mt. Joli, St. Gervais. A walk of forty-five minutes brought us to a point on the road opposite the village La Vilette, the abode of several chamois hunters, with whom Hudson had made expeditions in the months of March and April, 1853. The occupation of the inhabitants of La Vilette deserves, perhaps, a passing notice. Upon the side of the higher mountains are situated numerous pastures, which are strictly called Alpes, and these serve during the short summer as feeding grounds for innumerable herds of cattle. Those who attend upon these cows pass a wild and barbarous life amid the mountains for three or four months of the year, during which time they rarely smoke, and never taste bread, meat, beer, or wine, but subsist entirely upon the various concoctions through which the milk passes in its transformation into cheese. This mode of living might give rise to a question for the physiologists. They

inhabit rude chalets or "Seen-hütte," in which the explorer of the higher mountains frequently finds a friendly welcome, an acceptable bowl of cream, and a *lively* and disagreeable couch. The effect produced by the interior of one of these hovels, after the arrival of three or four Alpine tourists, is worthy of the pencil of a Rembrandt. The huts generally lean against a natural slope of the mountain's side, and are built up of loose masses of rock with smaller pieces in the crevices. From wall to wall are stretched rough pine-wood logs, and on these are laid flat stones that serve as a substitute for slate roofing. From a moveable beam near one of the corners of the inner apartment a huge cauldron of seething milk is suspended over a wood-fire, whence in the deepening shades of evening there flickers an uncertain gleam. At a convenient distance has been raised a rude pile of stones supporting the large bowl of hot milk in which are soaking pieces of bread, that, as an unwonted luxury, have been contributed to the evening meal, from the stores of the newly arrived guests. They are themselves seated on low stools, each with a central

solitary leg, and while eagerly dipping their long wooden ladles into the simple brew, they satisfy the cravings of a mountain appetite. The uncouth figures of the herdsmen, negligently thrown into picturesque attitudes, or stalking like Macbeth's witches about the cauldron, complete the picture.

The life led by these people in desolate spots many miles away from any human habitation, though passed amidst the grandest scenery of the Alps, appears to be particularly wretched: they rarely, if ever, change their dress, and as for washing, it is not thought of except on those frequent occasions when by dipping their hands in the seething curds, they contrive to impart to the incipient cheese the racy Gr uy ere flavour. After their summer sojourn in these remote and rarely visited altitudes, they descend to the lower villages, where they pass the winter months in carving wood, and in other in-door occupations. La Vilette is a village especially inhabited by this class of Swiss peasantry. One of the chas-seurs to whose dwelling we directed our steps, at once fell in with our plans, and promised to engage as many porters at five francs each

as we desired. He asked twenty-five francs each for the services of himself and Cuidet ; and to these two men we afterwards added a third on the same terms. The porters were to carry our food and blankets to the foot of the Aiguille du Gouté, and return the same day. The three chasseurs were to sleep with us at the foot of the Aiguille and accompany us the second day to the summit of the Dome du Gouté. Mollard appeared greatly to prefer this arrangement, to receiving fifty francs on condition of accompanying us to the summit of Mont Blanc ; and the reason he gave was, that the fatigue of ascending was so great that he would require two or three days' rest before returning to his ordinary pursuits. This arrangement coincided with our wishes ; for, in the first place, it enabled us to take sufficient wraps and condiments to pass a pleasant night in the little cabin at the foot of the Aiguille, and freed us from the necessity of carrying anything on our own backs to the summit of the Dome ; and, in the second place, it left us free to persevere on our own responsibility in climbing the highest peak, as long as we thought proper.

On Sunday, 12th, we saw Mollard for a few minutes, when he came down to the village of St. Gervais, to hear the discourse delivered by a Protestant Pasteur, who comes from Geneva every fortnight to preach to those of the Roman Catholic population who are willing to hear him.

Two of the party had agreed to be up sometimes to make blanket-sacks, in which we might sleep: for Smyth's tent would not hold us all, and it would be necessary for the rest to repose on the most comfortable rock that could be found in the neighbourhood of the encampment. Hudson had found out the utility of a sack when bivouacking on the snows in the winter of 1852, and the spring of 1853; and by this means was enabled to sleep comfortably, even when, on one occasion the thermometer was below zero. The wind continued to blow steadily, though gently, from the north all this time, and was in the same quarter when we rose on Monday morning.

Mollard and his five porters appeared at the appointed time; and we could not help being struck with their gaiety and cheerfulness of



demeanour as contrasted with the churlishness of the porters at Courmayeur. The clouds began to collect after seven o'clock in the morning, but as the wind was from the dry quarter, we were pretty sanguine of having tolerable weather.

As is invariably the case, much time was occupied in getting our things together, in packing them, and in apportioning them to the different porters. It was about nine o'clock when the party sallied forth from the charming little Hotel du Mont Joli, with the good wishes of our excellent landlord, Monsieur Rosset, who, both on our account and for his own sake, was very desirous we should succeed. From the balcony also many handkerchiefs waved a kind adieu. After walking up the valley for fifty minutes we reached the village of Bionay, and here we halted to buy a sack of charcoal and to borrow a thick blanket at the little inn. We now left the high road, which leads towards the Col du Bonhomme, and ascended a foot-path to the left, which leads over the Col de Voza to Chamounix. In a quarter of an hour we fell in with Cuidet and Hoste, the

other chasseurs, and our sixth porter, "Le Pauvre Joseph," as he is called in his native valley. He is a half-witted man, with a head sadly disproportioned to the diminutive size of his body; laden as he was with a large bundle of straw tied up in blankets, for a shake-down on the rocks of the Aiguille du Gouté, he looked for all the world like a gigantic mushroom.

Fifty minutes above Bionay is the village of Bionassay, where we got three more blankets, and then the party proceeded to the highest chalet which lies on the slopes of the Mont Lacha. At this spot, which is perhaps forty minutes above Bionassay, we halted to have some bread-and-milk and cheese. We also engaged the owner to carry two cans of milk to our sleeping place.

From this chalet we descended a little into the valley along which flows the Glacier de Bionassay, and proceeding along the right bank of this glacier, we skirted on our left the rocky base of the picturesque Aiguille de Bellevue, and shortly afterwards turning abruptly to the left, we mounted towards the Pierre Ronde. The origin of this latter name, which

is given to a part of the slope between the glacier and the Tête Rouge, is involved in obscurity.

There is no path whatever from the glacier upwards, and consequently our party of sixteen became gradually broken up into threes and fours as we ascended this rocky incline.

Near this place an accident befel the sole remaining barometer, being the one that belonged to Ainslie. He had never before this morning entrusted it to any guide or porter; but he thought it would surely be safe on the back of one of the chasseurs, so long as the path continued good. Unfortunately the man to whom it was consigned turned it upside down, and carried it some distance in this position; in consequence of which a considerable quantity of mercury escaped, and rendered the instrument, for the time, quite useless.

Having passed the Pierre Ronde, we began to ascend towards the Tête Rouge; and now we had occasional glimpses, through the mist, of the magnificent Aiguille du Bionassay, which rose very abruptly to our right. This Aiguille is well seen from several points of

the road between the Bonhomme and St. Gervais. Whether it is accessible or not it would be difficult to determine: but if it be, the Col du Miage must be the line of march.

Although few of our porters carried more than twenty pounds, the steepness and length of the climb was beginning to tell, and we had to pull up for them very frequently. We once thought of pitching the tent near the summit of the Aiguille du Gouté, but about this time it became evident, both from the unsettled state of the weather and the lateness of the hour, that we could not comfortably gain so great an elevation. Not far from the termination of this our first day's march, we inspected with feelings of interest the cabin which some seventy years since sheltered De Saussure when he sought to ascend Mont Blanc by the same route which we were now pursuing. Had the professor relied upon his own determination this attempt might have been crowned with success; he however sent Pierre Balmat in advance, who, upon his return, stated that the snow was in a treacherous state, and the enterprise was in consequence relinquished.

The mists were now greatly on the increase, and therefore as soon as we were fairly on the backbone of the Tête Rouge, we halted until the rest of the party, eleven in number, came up. Several ptarmigan, or Albins, as they are called by the peasants, wheeled past at this time, and alighted within a short distance of us. These birds are easily shot, as they are not timid, and their flights are generally short. We remained stationary amongst the boulders, which were scattered in endless confusion around, until at last we were made aware of the approach of our friends the chasseurs, by the tapping of their iron spikes against the stones; and presently their figures and those of the porters loomed through the gloom. For some time we climbed the *arrête* in silence, and kept pretty well together, but at the end of half an hour there were again stragglers; and it seemed best to halt at once, and not allow them to fall too much into the rear. Most of the baggage-bearers came in sight in a couple of minutes, when it appeared that there were still some defaulters, and considerably beneath, “Le Pauvre Joseph” was seen, laboriously toiling up the steep and

broken ascent under his not very tremendous load.

When Joseph had got up to the rest of the party, who waited for him, and had changed his mushroom excrescence for a somewhat lighter burden, we once more sped forwards, and in half an hour had gained the two cabins which had been built the one in 1853, the other in 1854. These rude and roofless huts serve occasionally as a refuge for a benighted chamois hunter; they are about 10,000 feet above the sea, or rather lower than the cabin at the Grands Mulets.

There is a spring of excellent water, which forces its way through the snow not thirty yards distant: this is the highest source we ever met with, and it is a luxury not enjoyed by our friends at the Grands Mulets.

Our first care was to place the blankets and knapsacks in a dry place, and cover them with the tent in order to preserve them from the small particles of snow which were now falling; and then we turned to the weather-beaten tenements which were to afford us shelter for the night. It was now about five o'clock, and much was yet to be done before

we could turn in for the night: there was therefore no time to be lost. Some of the party were in favour of the huts, and others disposed to abandon them, and pitch the tent in a sheltered nook somewhat lower down the rocks. As the remaining hours of daylight were too few to allow of much discussion as to the relative merits of these two positions, and as we could not afford to divide our forces, it was put to the vote. The voices in favour of the huts were the more numerous; and when this point was decided there was no further difficulty, but all of us now set to work with a hearty good will; at the same time the porters put their hands in their pockets and looked cold, while the three chamois hunters gave us little or no assistance.

Ainslie had now an opportunity of displaying his skill as a pupil of Sir Charles Barry, and without loss of time he commenced his professional examination of the shattered walls, and gave directions as to what description of stones and slates should be collected. There was other work to be done; the floor was thickly coated with ice, and

this again sustained a heavy covering of snow.

Our haches or ice axes quickly cut this snow to pieces, and we then threw the morsels over the wall which was flush with the precipice. The ice required more labour, but this likewise was in a short time disposed of in a similar way. Our next domestic labour was to lay a flooring of thin slates, and upon this we spread the straw. About this time our architect pronounced the wall in a fit state to receive the roof, and we accordingly laid the waterproof tent over rough fir poles; which had been brought up from the valley the previous year; our alpenstocks and the poles of our tent being also put into requisition for the same purpose. Taking a hint too from the construction of the Swiss chalets, our architect directed his men to lay heavy stones when practicable upon our roof—a method of construction rendered necessary by the sudden gusts of wind which threatened every moment to carry away our light waterproof. We unpacked our stores and stowed them away in safe and accessible corners, chiefly behind Grenville Smyth, who undertook on this as



well as on a former occasion the commissariat department.

At about 6 P.M. the porters had wished us good night, and success, and departed down the mountain. Just before their departure the clouds, which apparently did not extend to a very considerable height above us, suddenly dropped, and thus caused one of those instantaneous and glorious transitions not unfrequent among the Alps. One minute we were in mid-winter working hard to keep ourselves warm, and the next, all was bright and clear overhead; while directly before us, the Aiguille du Gouté, the commencement of the morrow's climb, reared her steep sides, covered with narrow glaciers; whilst on our right was the noble Aiguille de Bionassay, covered on the north-side with snow of unsullied purity, but of most appalling steepness.

This splendid sight cheered us all, and restored the most desponding; it was but transient, however, for, ere many seconds had elapsed, we were once more enveloped in clouds and exposed to a slight fall of snow. To return to creature comforts: we increased the size of our house, by adding a wing, in

the shape of a large woollen cloth, hung from the wall, over the door, and resting on poles placed in a slanting position. In this, our outer chamber, Mollard kindled a fire of charcoal and kept it burning all-night. As it was now getting dark, we lighted one of the bougies, and prepared for our evening meal, for which our walk and masonic operations had given us a good appetite. Cold mutton, and bread-and-butter formed the staple of our repast. We cut up a roll of chocolate, and this boiled with milk and sugar formed a very refreshing beverage. Those who had been provident, encased their lower extremities in sacks; the others wrapped themselves in blankets, and arranging ourselves so as to afford to one another the greatest facility for moving our legs, we all sought to snatch a few hours' sleep. New quarters, especially when they are of so novel a character as these, close packing, the prospect of being called two hours before daylight, doubts about the weather; these, and many other sources of disturbance, combined to drive away, at least for a time, sweet repose. In our case it was only for a short time, for all the party enjoyed

more or less sound sleep, and awoke greatly refreshed by it. During the night, we heard the roar of numerous avalanches; and the wind, which during the early part of the night came in gusts, threatened to remove the only shelter which we had overhead.

August 14th, Mollard, according to our injunctions, woke the camp at two precisely; and we were delighted to find that it was a still calm morning, with a bright star-lit sky. The breakfast operations were commenced forthwith, but they took a considerable time, before they were brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Ainslie cut up a cake of chocolate, whilst Hudson and his young friend George Joad, who were close to one another, beat up eggs, flour, and milk, for a hasty-pudding. Hudson was next to the door of our mansion, and thus the nearest one to the fire; consequently the cooking devolved upon him; Mollard assisted him in this; he however contributed more especially to the success of our operations, by using his mouth and throat as a pair of bellows, — an operation which was chiefly left to him, as it seemed but a poor preparation for a long day's

climb. Being unversed in the culinary art, the *chef de cuisine* was ignorant of the proportions of the various ingredients required to give the proper consistence to the whole; fortunately, however, he had not to do with fastidious epicures just sitting down to dinner at Richmond or Blackwall, and the mixture was voted *nem. con.* worthy of the immortal Soyer. Ainslie's brew of chocolate was likewise very acceptable to us all, as we drank it from tins handed round the circle. When the large dish of hasty-pudding was put in the midst of the party, and spoons duly distributed, we were sorry to see that only six dipped into it, whereas our party consisted of seven. Stevenson, who on the previous day had energetically brought his axe to bear upon the hard ice, and had shown no signs of flagging, now felt unwell, and unable to proceed; and he was unwilling to delay the rest of the party by starting with them. He could neither eat nor drink anything at this our morning meal; and that is always a bad symptom; for so long as a man can eat and sleep well, there is little danger of his undertaking too much.

The temperature was about freezing point, or somewhat lower towards morning, but we were not at all inconvenienced by it, so well had the sacks done their duty.

The chamois hunters breakfasted on bread and butter and a little mutton, which they washed down with *vin rouge*: they then said they were ready for the start whenever we liked. Every one now looked out for his boots or shoes, and found them pretty dry and comfortable, as we had not been obliged, on the previous evening, to traverse much soft snow. Mons. Rosset, our landlord at St. Gervais, had put us up a parcel of raisins, which, as well as figs, are very palatable and refreshing on high mountain ascents, and these were divided amongst the party. This done, the signal for a start was given, and exactly at 4 A.M. we set out in high spirits, in consequence of the bright morning which augured well for success.

How differently was the scene now from that presented by the gloomy mists of the last afternoon and evening. Then all was dreary, cold, and desolate; now all the beauties and wonders of these lofty mountains and

glaciers were displayed to view, as they lay in calm repose during the hour which immediately preceded sunrise.

Having made a dozen steps from our hut, we were upon the snow, which was tolerably level for a short distance, and over which our route lay, as we kept slightly to our left, in order to avoid the fearfully steep slopes which led down to the glacier de Bionassay on the right.

It may be as well, before we advance further, to describe the nature and appearance of this Aiguille du Gouté, up the northern face of which we had to climb. As seen from St. Martin or Sallenches, this mountain, the peaked summit of which, according to De Saussure, is about 13,000 feet above the sea, has the appearance of a very steep incline, down which several narrow glaciers flow, and these ice-streams are again separated by long and continuous ridges of rock, which, for the most part, extend from the snowy base to the culminating point of the Aiguille.

After twenty minutes' walk from our hut we came to the edge of a steep and narrow glacier called here a "couloir." There hap-

pened to be a considerable coating of snow on the surface of the ice, and this facilitated our passage ; as steps are much more easily cut in hard snow than in ice. The couloir is inclined at an angle of forty-three degrees, as we found by the goniometer, — a small and very portable instrument which we had brought from London for the purpose of measuring inclinations. The chief risk in passing this narrow ice-stream arises from the stones which from time to time become detached from above, and come tumbling down at a tremendous pace : but when we consider that we selected a favourable moment, and that the whole party were across it in about eight minutes, it will be seen that the chance of being hit is very small. During the summer months, in consequence of the diminution of the snow, there is no necessity for climbing over the crest of the rocks. Mollard, George, and Hudson were the last of the party at this point, and before crossing the Couloir it was deemed advisable to attach a rope to George, in order to guard against a slip which, in such a position, might have been attended with disastrous consequences, as the ice-stream we

were about to cross sloped rapidly away to our right, until lost amid the yawning crevasses of the Glacier de Bionassay.

At exactly twelve minutes past six o'clock A.M., we were on the summit of the redoubtable Aiguille, where we stood for ten minutes to admire the view which was already vastly extensive to the East, North, and West. Although until a late hour in the afternoon the sky was gloriously clear, and of the deepest blue, yet, from time to time, and particularly in the early morning, some of the valleys were bathed in a sea of clouds. These, however, by no means impaired the glories of the view, the details of which we had now leisure to examine. The mountain peaks piercing the line of clouds in all directions clothed with their eternal snows,—the-pine clad valleys and pastures running up between the edges of the Pennine chain,—the mountain torrents,—the bubbling gushing Arve meandering playfully through the vale of Chamounix and hurrying onwards to its home in the ocean,—presented a panorama which an artist would delight to study.

The Buet reared his rounded and hoary



summit pure and bright as he received the first rays of the morning sun, and far far away to the N.W. the eye could with difficulty discern beyond the Dole, the blue waters of Lake Lemman backed by the distant range of the Jura. Had no other view than this greeted us throughout the day we should have considered ourselves amply repaid for the difficulties and fatigues of the adventure. When the eye is directed from Chamounix towards the point where we now stood, there appears to be a gap between the Aiguille and Dôme; but this is not really the case; for by keeping close to the precipices on the west,—that is, to those overhanging the Glacier de Bionassay,—we escaped all descent, and gently mounted towards the Dôme. We saw a few large crevasses, but they were easily avoided, and we were not obliged to cross one. As it was the western side of the Dôme which we were ascending, the sun's rays were hid from us by the intervening ridge, and the north wind was consequently all the more chilling. When Hudson inquired of George, next to whom he was walking, if he were inconvenienced by the cold, he replied in the affirmative; and as

he had only started with the intention of going a part of the way, he thought he might as well beat a retreat at once. This was thought a judicious step; and accordingly Mollard was requested to descend with our young traveller as far as the tent, where they would join Stevenson, and then the two companions would descend to Chamounix by the village of Les Ouches.

Ten minutes later we reached the crest of the Dôme, and then regretted that George had not accompanied us to this point; but when he turned back, we did not know how close it was. When once over the crest of the mountain, we were completely sheltered from the keen wind, and were basking in the sun, and then we heard Cuidet's voice exclaiming, "Voilà le Mont Blanc." And truly it was thrilling and delightful to turn our gaze southwards and behold, for the first time since we had left Courmoyeur, this noble peak, this object of our wishes, no longer separated from us by barriers well-nigh impassable, but which, as it stood out in bold relief against the deep azure sky, seemed rather to hail our approach, and bid us a kindly welcome. When

with one brief look, our eyes traversed the Grand Plateau, at our feet, and then, wandering up the steep snows which led directly to the highest summit, there rested for a time, it seemed as though they would never tire gazing at the spectacle. Though Mont Blanc was scarcely fifteen hundred feet above us, there were still many hours of work before the victory would be gained.

The two remaining chasseurs, Cuidet and Hoste, accompanied us for a few hundred yards down the gentle slope which led to the Grand Plateau, and then we halted.

Cuidet pointed out two large crevasses at the upper extremity of the Plateau, and told us the Chamounix route lay between them. This information was useful, but beyond this place we should have received little benefit from the presence even of the best-informed guide, since the right direction was well known to us from ocular observation, from examining models of the chain, and from numerous conversations with those who had frequently visited those heights. Our baggage consisted of two knapsacks, which were carried by the different members of our little caravan,—now

reduced to five, — Grenville and Christopher Smyth, Kennedy, Ainslie, and Hudson. In the shape of food we had a couple of very diminutive chickens, about a pound of mutton, half a loaf of bread, a few pears and raisins, and one bottle of Frontignan wine. From the point at which Cuidet and his companions had turned back, there were two lines of march open for our choice. One of these led over the Grand Plateau, and there joined the Chamounix route: the other avoided the Plateau altogether and led up the *arrête* or ridge which connects the *Dôme du Gouté* with Mont Blanc, and considered by De Saussure to be impracticable.

Hudson had many times hovered about St. Gervais, and for the last three years had had a strong desire to try this ridge, as it would shorten the ascent by two hours. With regard to the practicability of this route, there exists a diversity of opinion. Those who live at St. Gervais, Bionassay, Bionay, La Vilette, and other adjacent villages, say it is quite impossible to mount Mont Blanc this way on account of a snowy or icy mound which rises abruptly midway. We are ignorant of the

*general* idea, at Chamounix, with regard to the difficulties presented by this mound, or "Bosse du Dromedaire," as it is called; but Victor Tairraz, one of the most enterprising and attentive of that staff of guides, stated that he had frequently regarded the Bosse from the Grand Plateau, and he thought it might probably not be an insuperable obstacle.

All our party, on the present occasion, examined the whole *arrête* very attentively and especially paid attention to the Bosse du Dromedaire, and our unanimous strong conviction was that there was nothing apparently to stop active determined mountaineers.

If this route be proved pretty easy of accomplishment, the St. Gervais side will indeed offer great advantages; for guides can be had there for a much smaller sum than the Chamounix regulations admit of, and the time and fatigue would be much less. We did not, however, try the "Dromedary's Hump" on this occasion; for the north wind was very strong and cold, and we should have been exposed to its chilling influences for more than two hours, had we climbed this precipitous and

completely exposed ridge of snow. Again: as some of our party were obliged to be in England in a few days, we did not like to endanger the success of this their last attempt by trying a route which might have ended in disappointment. We therefore decided in favour of the longer but more certain route through the Corridor and by the Mur de la Côte.

A tolerably rapid descent of thirty-five minutes took us from the Dôme du Gouté to the further extremity of the Grand Plateau. Here we halted and prepared for a second breakfast. After demolishing the greater part of the mutton, and half our stock of bread and wine, we placed our goods and chattels once more in the knapsacks and left them lying in the snow. With the exception of a crust of bread and the few raisins which had been originally divided amongst the party, we left everything on this elevated plane of snow until our return.

As we proposed to descend directly to Chamonix by the "Little Plateau," the Grands Mulets, and the Glacier des Bossons, we took some pains to reconnoitre, with the eye, from the entrance of the Corridor, the probable

route we should have to take in descending. We also consulted the excellent map of these snow-fields by Professor Forbes, which Kennedy carried, and from present observations and previous information, we felt pretty certain of our course.

As the snow was rather soft, we agreed that after each of the party had gone in the van for a quarter of an hour, he should fall to the rear: and by this means the labour of walking first through the snow was divided.

We now commenced our work in good earnest and without a single doubt as to the issue of our undertaking, so far as it depended on our own exertions; for each of the party knew by past experience, that he could depend on every one else for coolness and energetic assistance in any exigency which might arise, and also for steady determination to accomplish what we had begun.

Hudson especially had so many times been baffled on this mountain, for want, as he says, of some tried English hearts, that on the present occasion he was particularly joyous and sanguine. Kennedy was in the front when we started from the Plateau, and he

was fortunate in having the post of honour in crossing the first crevasse ; for just as his allotted time for taking the lead was expiring, we arrived at this natural and sometimes formidable barrier,— this yawning though strikingly beautiful abyss in the glacier. This chasm, the bottom of which we could not see, and which lay directly across our line of march, is one of a particular class. Though it never for two days together presents precisely the same peculiarities, it is nevertheless permanent in its general features and in its position. It is at present nameless ; we venture, however, to call it the Crevasse des Rochers Rouges, since those are the rocks in which it has its south-western origin. To the right it terminated in impracticable precipices of ice from which the thundering avalanche is constantly falling : and to the left it seemed to run off amongst masses so broken up and tossed about as to forbid approach. Whether it were possible to double the crevasse we did not determine, for we gave but little time to minute examination. A much simpler means of passing it at once presented itself ; and this was a snow bridge.

This is an expression which is doubtless



familiar to most of our readers ; it is possible, however, that some few of them may not have perfectly clear ideas either of the causes which lead to their formation, or of their general appearances. When situated at great elevations they span crevasses which form in most cases scenes of surpassing beauty and grandeur. The glacier deeply covered with winter snows moves onwards at an annual rate, varying from a few yards to four hundred feet, and in passing over its rocky bed becomes twisted and contorted into huge and indescribable forms, and penetrated in all directions by cracks and crevasses that at first are but a mere line across the ice. These will suddenly become gaping chasms many feet in width. At other times they gradually increase, and the snow which had previously covered the entire surface partly falls into the gulf beneath, and only small portions are left, forming those snow-bridges which afford such essential aid to the traveller. The crevasse which now intercepted our path extended from right to left across a steep inclination of the glacier, and presented the features that are generally seen in all those similarly situated. These

features are of surpassing loveliness and well deserve the name of "Nature's Toys," which has been bestowed upon them by a friend.

The lower edge of the crevasse, which is from ten to twenty feet below the upper one, is formed of ice and snow, and is rounded off in each direction; on one side falling away gradually into the snow slope, and on the other side changing into the walls of the crevasse. Over the upper edge the higher portion of the snow slope projects in the form of the eaves of a thatched roof, and from it glorious icicles six inches in diameter and thirty feet in length are suspended like a fringe of crystals, lining the other side of the chasm. These walls are irregularly vertical; they are of a greenish hue at the top, and as the depth increases they gradually change into a beautiful azure. The crevasse des Rochers Rouges was our first difficulty, and as Kennedy was leader at the time, though with but three minutes to spare when he reached it, it devolved upon him to find a passage.

Ainslie loosened the rope, which he generally carried when it was not being used by the party; and Kennedy, having made one end

fast round his waist, advanced pole in hand. Although the bridge was steep and very narrow, and rose up quite into a thin edge, yet, except for a small space in the middle, it was so thick and solid, that the poles could not be forced through it. Hence there was no danger of its breaking with our weight. Care, however, and steadiness were required in order to avoid all risk of slipping off into the vault beneath.

There was a second bridge more to the left, but this, though broader, appeared insecure, and it actually gave way under its own weight, within a couple of days, as we heard from a friend, the Rev. W. Templer, who passed over ours on the morning of the 16th of August, as he was on his way up Mont Blanc from Chamounix.

When Kennedy reached the opposite bank, he planted his ashen staff firmly in the snow, and gave the rope two or three turns round it; those on the other side tightened it; and then one by one we crossed over, using the line as a balluster, and carefully placing our feet in the old foot-prints.

We were now at the entrance of the "Cor-

ridor," a passage which has Mont Blanc to the right, and the Monts Maudits to the left. The lower part of the "Rochers Rouges" forms, indeed, the first portion of the western or right wall of this passage, but both the rocks which are known by the title of "rouge" are only parts of the Dome of Mont Blanc.

Since many of our readers may have traced from the Jura above Geneva a likeness to Napoleon in the contour of this mountain, it may be mentioned as a matter of curiosity, that the Upper Rocher Rouge forms the eye, the lower one the upper lip, and the corridor the mouth of the emperor. The three-cornered cap, so inseparably connected with the first Napoleon, is distinctly visible, though more to the right, when the fancied resemblance is seen from Geneva or any point on the northern side of the mountain.

As we passed along the Corridor, we kept continually mounting, though its inclination is not great. We were now marching nearly due south, in a line at right angles to the great Pennine Chain. Nothing of particular interest occurred; there were no more crevasses; the snow was pretty good, and we

scarcely sank ankle deep ; and nothing of the plain was visible to the east, south, or west, so completely were we shut in by the snow and rocks. When we reached the upper extremity of the corridor, we stood still at a point overhanging the enormous and very precipitous Glacier de Brenva, which rolls vast masses of snow and ice almost from the summit of Mont Blanc to the valley below. The excessive steepness of this glacier renders its onward motion so impetuous, that on its arrival in the Allée Blanche, some ten thousand feet below, the ice is forced up against the mountains on the other side of the valley. The Cramont and Saxe, which when seen from Courmayeur had appeared to us by no means unimportant members of the Alps, were now so far beneath us as to be scarcely discernible from the plain. The valleys immediately at the foot of the vast rocky walls, and pinnacles of the south-side of the chain, can be well seen from the spot where we now stood, even better than from the summit of Mont Blanc. The peaks of Mont Rosa, Mont Combin, Mont Velan, and the noble Matterhorn, are seen from this point to great advan-

tage. At the expiration of one hour and a half from the Grand Plateau we were at the foot of the Mur de la Côte. The terrible colouring with which Albert Smith has painted this well-known portion of the route has been the fertile source of doubt and hesitation, and has deterred many from attempting the ascent. The horrors of the Mur de la Côte are perhaps impressed more vividly upon the imagination, by means of the excellent diagram in which are depicted the whole party of guides and travellers, sticking like flies to this "tremendous and almost perpendicular wall of ice," while beneath yawn fearful chasms, into which "a single false step would plunge the unfortunate traveller."

That the impression produced upon the mind should receive its tone according to the temperament of the traveller, and be proportional to the amount of labour required to overcome the difficulties of the ascent, is to be expected. Hence these have been depicted with more or less fidelity by most of those who have met with success.

It would appear from the Chamounix accounts that the guides, on their arrival at the

extremity of the Corridor, ascend in an oblique direction along the face of the Mur de la Côte, and, after traversing this wall of ice for some time, skirt its south-eastern angle. Hence their path overhangs an awful chasm of the depth of which no notion can be formed.

Instead of adopting the orthodox zig-zag, we turned directly to the right, meeting the slope “*en face*,” and thus avoided these terrible precipices. Should any future traveller follow our route and miss his footing even when near the summit, he would, if ascending, simply lose his labour, and, if descending, he would hasten his return to Chamounix ; for in either case he would slide downwards until his course was arrested by the soft snow of the Corridor. To the right we saw considerable quantities of ice bright in the rays of the morning sun. And close upon our left we had the southern glaciers, which fall down many thousand feet so abruptly as to be quite inaccessible from the valley beneath. In such a position, with a steep slope of ice on one side, and precipices on the other, there was no possibility of mistaking the true direction : in fact we had nothing more to do than to mount

straight up; and in places where the snow was too hard to be penetrated by our shoes, to cut a few steps with our haches.

Ainslie and Kennedy carried ash poles with steel spikes, which they brought from England; Grenville, Christopher, Smyth, and Hudson carried haches, which are ashen poles from four to five feet in length with iron heads about ten inches long and sharpened exactly like a small pick-axe. The guides who ascend Mont Blanc from Chamounix always carry two or three of these instruments, which need not be heavier than a short staff, and are lighter than the poles usually used.

The upper part of the Mur de la Côte is the steepest, and here the inclination is forty-six degrees,—about six degrees less than that of the M. Blanc du Tacul. Unfortunately Ainslie's barometer was now *hors de combat*, and Smyth's had long been in the same predicament, so we had no means of accurately measuring the vertical height of this, the most abrupt height of the whole ascent. It did not appear to be more than 300 feet above the Corridor, and yet three quarters of an hour were occupied before it was completely vanquished.



When we had reached the summit of the "Mur" we found a crevasse to our right, which, however, we did not cross, but wandered along its left bank, and were obliged to keep close to the brink, because, a few feet from it, the snow sloped away very rapidly towards the precipice of the Glacier de Brenva.

A few minutes' walking over a tolerable level surface brought us to a large rock which protrudes to a considerable height through the snow: this is called the lower of the "Petits Mulets," and it is well seen from the Dôme du Gouté; whence it was pointed out by Cuidet before he departed, and he remarked at the same time that we should leave it on our left.

The two Smyths, who were in the van during the last part of the ascent of the dreaded Mur, had advanced towards the base of the Calotte or summit of M. Blanc rejoicing in the prospect of immediate success. Unaware of Cuidet's direction, they took the left side of the Petits Mulets, and set to work to scale the last slope of mixed ice and snow which led to the summit. But the path became steeper and steeper, and the thin coating of snow upon the hard ice was insufficient to afford a secure

footing. Grenville Smyth soon gave up the attempt and returned to his comrades, who were winding their way to the right of the rocks, but his brother proceeded with hearty good will to cut steps in the hard green ice and soon gained a considerable elevation. We began to think that he had after all chosen the best route, and he, no doubt, was congratulating himself on having stolen a march upon us, when, to our amusement, a more energetic blow than usual with his axe, caused one of his feet to lose its hold from its slippery resting place: the consequences of this were instantaneous; unable to retain his hold of the axe, the point of which remained firmly embedded in the hard ice, he shot down with great rapidity over the cold rough surface, to the discomfiture of his nether garments, until the soft snow of the plain put a stop to his downward course some few yards in our rear. Amused as much as we were at this abrupt check, he quietly emptied his pockets and sleeves of the snow which they had gathered during the fall, and then rejoined our line.

We are not unfrequently told by gentlemen who have attained our present height, and

have afterwards published their experience, that every one suffers, more or less, at these great elevations, from nausea, vomiting, and drowsiness, which are sometimes accompanied by bleeding at the nose, eyes, or ears, and by an utter prostration of strength.

Now this is by no means universally true; for of our party of five here collected together merely from a similarity of tastes, not one at any time experienced the slightest tendency to affections of this character.

Our ascents of Monte Rosa and Mont Blanc confirmed the opinion which past experience had induced us to form; and we have little hesitation in asserting our belief that these symptoms proceed chiefly from fatigue, though they may be increased by the rarity of the air, which compels us to take various precautions, uncalled for in a denser atmosphere.

It was only during our passage of the Corridor that we observed the regular changes at the end of each quarter of an hour; since that time the snow had been hard, and therefore it was as easy to walk first as last. We were now going in single file, and approaching the higher of the Petits Mulets, which is at no

very great distance from the rocks previously mentioned.

It will be remembered that one of our party had lost his hache; some one now suggested that steps should be cut to enable him to go forward more easily; but it appeared unadvisable to waste strength which might, and probably would, have large demands made upon it, before we were once more safely at Chamounix.

Hudson, however, offered his hache to Smyth as an equivalent for the steps which had been proposed, and, though he declined, Hudson stuck it into the snow, so that it might be taken up as we all moved forward. Though this part of the mountain is not steep, yet the snow was so very hard and slippery, that Hudson found considerable difficulty in keeping his feet, and was several times obliged to have recourse to his hands, to avoid falling, sometimes going even on all-fours, when the surface of the glacier was a little steeper than ordinary.

Some little time after passing the Petits Mulets, we turned slightly to the right and then ascended straight to the ridge above us;

and from this we looked down to the southern valleys. The eye at once detected a slight rise in this narrow edge, and we all set off by tacit consent for a point which was only a few yards distant, and but three or four feet above us ; and when we reached it, we had completed our wishes, for we at last stood on the highest pinnacle of Mont Blanc. The members of our little caravan stepped almost simultaneously at 12.35 P.M. upon the crown of the monarch, with a feeling of gratification that it is impossible to describe. We looked in each other's face ; we there saw reflected an universal beam of satisfaction, and by a simultaneous impulse the hands of all were united in a hearty grasp of congratulation.

We did not, however, long retain our position there, for, on turning our faces to the north, we were greeted by a most bitter wind, which, though not sufficiently violent to render our footing insecure, was quite cold enough to render a prolonged stay very unpleasant. It did not occur to us till too late, that if we had descended a few feet on the Italian side, we should have been completely sheltered from the keen blast, and might have sat down

in comfort for three quarters of an hour, or even longer. As it was, after a few minutes, the idea of at once descending spontaneously suggested itself to each of the party, and three forthwith proceeded to put it into execution.

Fortunately, one or two remembered, ere too late, that it would be very desirable to examine the steepness of the snows which led immediately from the summit towards the "Bosse du Dromedaire" and the Col du Miage; and with a view to this, C. Smyth and Hudson went forward in a westerly direction, until they gained the other extremity of the ridge. The Bosse du Dromedaire lay at their feet, and as the eye hastily surveyed it, and those parts of the *arrête* which were visible from this point of observation, they could detect nothing to prevent the ascent of Mont Blanc being made by this route. The Col du Miage was some distance to the left, and they could see so little of the intervening snow fields as to be unable to offer an opinion as to the practicability of mounting from it. It seems strange that so many years should have passed away without more vigorous exertions having been made to scale this lofty dome

from many other points ; for surely it is much more interesting to explore and find out some new route, than to follow for ever in the same well-known track.

This may, perhaps, be accounted for, by supposing on the one hand that the peasants do not feel sufficient interest in these matters, to induce them to sacrifice some of the finest days in the year ; and, on the other hand, that our own enterprising countrymen, and able mountaineers from other countries, make too limited a sojourn in this land of mountains, to enable them to gain that experience of glaciers which is essential before any attempt be made at discovering unknown paths.

But all this time the two are standing alone on the mountain top, exposed to the same unrelenting north wind, while their companions are rapidly descending. Hudson and Smyth walked back to the highest point, and then, turning to the left, ran down the hard frozen steep towards the Petit Mulets, and as nothing occurred to impede their course, they overtook the others before they reached the first rock. There all stopped for a few

seconds to pick up small pieces of the granite which had been splintered from the main block by the action of the frost and weather. Having pocketed our specimens, we hastened forward at a double quick pace until we gained the shelter of the lower of the Petit Mulets. Here we waited six or eight minutes or perhaps more, whilst C. Smyth recovered his hache, and Kennedy and Ainslie tied pieces of ribbon to points of the rocks in places most out of the reach of wind and snow-storms. What a pity Stevenson was not here; he was so well furnished with various sorts of souvenirs collected from different quarters for this very purpose. He had had, however, the satisfaction of bequeathing part of his stock to the care of the rocks on the highest peak of the noble Monte Rosa; and there they will be in far greater security from pilfering hands than on Mont Blanc. Although we were unable on the summit to have more than a glance round the horizon, yet from our present position we could view everything to the north, east, and west equally well; and the expanse of the mountain-ranges and valleys to the south was seen from the upper extremity of the Corridor;



therefore we did not lose anything by our short sojourn on the highest point.

When the pieces of silk were satisfactorily adjusted to the rock, we continued our descent. Our little band were in overflowing spirits, for entirely free from the most remote idea of “violent sickness or hæmorrhage,” we had successively overcome all those difficulties which the graphic powers of Albert Smith have immortalised.

We are now at the summit of the Mur de la Côte, down which, “should the foot slip, or the bâton give way, you would glide like lightning from one frozen crag to another, and finally be dashed to pieces, hundreds and hundreds of feet below, in the horrible depths of the glacier.” We, however, left this portion of the Mur a few feet to the right, and selected a safer, although a steeper line of descent.

Exhilarated in the highest degree by the glorious air, we paused but a moment to cast a hasty glance down the icy wall, and launched forth. One or two of us made use of the half dozen steps we had previously cut, but then finding that the snow was generally in a favourable state, we ventured to descend by an ordi-

nary glissade, and shortly afterwards, amid shouts and cheers, safely landed in the Corridor.

The plan sometimes adopted by the uninitiated, of sitting down on an incline of snow instead of remaining erect, is by no means the most approved or the safest. Indeed if the snow be hard and the inclination great, this is a dangerous experiment; for the slider soon loses all command of himself, as he is hurled down the steep with a velocity constantly increasing, and though there may be no rocks nor precipices in his course, yet an accident might still happen.

Nothing occurred as we ran down the Corridor we soon reached the snow-bridge over the crevasse, which was passed in safety, after we had taken the same precautions as in the morning.

In a few minutes we were once more on the Grand Plateau, and standing near the scene of our breakfast. It was now 1.40 P.M., so that a little more than one hour had sufficed to bring us a distance which had cost three hours and three quarters in the ascent, although there were two halts in the descent and none as we were mounting.

The diminutive poulet was equally divided into five parts, and distributed amongst the party by Kennedy, who shortly afterwards proceeded to a like distribution of six pears. No one remembers what he did with the sixth, doubtless he disposed of it in a "way" that afforded general satisfaction. The wine shared the same fate; and nothing of the general stock remained but an atom of mutton and an equally insignificant piece of bread.

It is now a little past two, and we have but five hours of actual daylight, in which to descend several thousand feet over snow-fields abounding in huge crevasses, and swept in parts by the constant succession of avalanches that fall from the Dôme du Gouté, and we have also to cross the Glacier des Bossons, where darkness would be still more trying and unpleasant than even on the higher parts of the mountain.

All the party are, consequently, eager for a start without any waste of time; so we will get under weigh. A few minutes brought us to the lower extremity of the plateau, close to the huge blocks which fall from the Dôme, and

there we commenced the descent in good earnest.

The snow was very soft, owing to the action of the sun, and we sank sometimes nearly knee-deep, and since this much increases the chance of breaking through into a hidden abyss, we fastened ourselves together with the rope, leaving intervals of four or five yards between each two.

We were at this moment passing the appalling crevasse into which the guides who accompanied Dr. Hamel, in 1820, were swept by an avalanche. No other fatal accident has occurred on Mont Blanc, we are therefore unwilling to pass by without some notice; but as Albert Smith has given an interesting account of the melancholy event, it is unnecessary to make more than a cursory allusion.

Dr. Hamel was sent out by the Russian Government to make experiments on Mont Blanc; and, with this view, he first attempted to ascend from the St. Gervais side, and by the Aiguille du Gouté, when he succeeded in reaching the summit of the Dôme, a spot just one thousand feet higher than the Aiguille.

The caravan did not go beyond this point ; the reason for the failure, as given by the peasants being, that the doctor had in the earlier part of the day roamed about too much ; and that, though a very strong and active man, this needless exertion had begun to tell upon him, when they had reached this great elevation. Dr. Hamel then proposed to bivouac on the Dôme and endeavour to reach the summit the following morning ; but to this his guides would by no means consent, as they had made no preparations for passing the night on the snow. The next time the gentleman tried the monarch, Chamounix was the starting point, and the first night the party slept at the "Grandes Mulets."

The snow began to fall heavily at this time, and when the usual starting hour arrived, the fresh snow was lying to a considerable thickness on the mountain.

Under these circumstances it is always very hazardous to cross or mount a steep slope which has either precipices or crevasses lying at its foot : and the reason is obvious ; freshly fallen snow will slide down any steep incline, such as the roof of a house or slopes of ice,

grass or hard frozen snow, and if in sufficient quantity will oftentimes form an avalanche, sweeping everything before in its progress. It was to such a risk that Dr. Hamel's party were exposed when his guides pursued their way directly from the Grand Plateau to the summit by the only route then known. By taking the route as at present pursued by La Vallée, and the Mur de la Côte, they would probably have escaped uninjured. They, however, left a huge crevasse just below their line of march, and were walking in single file, so that they thus cut through the layer of fresh snow, and started an avalanche which swept most of the caravan away, and hurried five of the guides into the yawning abyss beneath. Of these five two were afterwards released by their companions, but the other three remained too deeply buried for human assistance to be of any avail.

After descending for some little time we reached the Little Plateau, over which are scattered in chaotic confusion the debris of innumerable avalanches. These avalanches pour down from the heights of the Dôme du Gouté, and are professedly regarded with the greatest dread by the leaders of the Chamounix

caravans. Here, too, the guides perform the farce of enjoining on the traveller perfect silence lest the slightest whisper should arouse these sleeping guardians of the mountain. When we saw Victor Tairraz (of whom mention has been already made), after his descent from Mont Blanc two days subsequently to our own, he said he had run great risk on the Little Plateau because he had approached too near to the Dôme whence fall these masses of ice and snow. In this we disagreed with him for the following reasons : —

Firstly. Because no *recent* avalanche had descended so low as the pass which he had traversed, and therefore it was improbable that the next, which must start from the same point, and under exactly similar circumstances, would continue its course over a much greater space than its immediate predecessor.

Secondly. It was highly improbable that an avalanche would fall during the minute or minute and a half required to cross their line of march; and even supposing one had started at that critical instant, it would have required more time to reach us than would have sufficed for us to have run to a place of

perfect safety. It may be as well to describe the nature of these avalanches, which continue to fall through the summer, lest they should be mistaken for, or confounded with, those vast masses of snow which descend from the mountains either immediately after a storm, or during the first very hot days in the spring. These latter are so huge, and impetuous in their course, that not unfrequently villages have been buried in them, and forest trees of the largest size snapped off by their headlong violence. But long before any considerable number of tourists have arrived in the Alpine valleys, all these have fallen, so that all risk is avoided until the next autumn or winter storms.

Above a certain elevation the snow as a general rule does not become sufficiently thawed and saturated with water to enable the succeeding frosts to render it of the nature of ice; and when this is the case, the mass is called "Nevé." Nevé is easily distinguished from the glacier ice, for it is always of a dead dull white, and never assumes the transparency or brilliancy of the other.

Lastly, the avalanches which fall from the



Dôme du Gouté upon the Little Plateau pass transversely over it, that is, over the inclined plane down which we were descending, and therefore it was still more easy to judge of the point at which we should be beyond their reach. I cannot but think that judgment, combined with experience, may enable a man, though passing at no great distance from the run of these falling blocks, to be comparatively in perfect security from them.

We were now crossing large tracts of Nevé, the surface of which is always covered with pretty recent snow, for we were still 10,000 feet above the sea. The crevasses in Nevé are generally wider and more fantastic than those in the ice, and of these we had abundant and magnificent specimens; for no sooner had we passed one, than another appeared a little below us; and, as it was not always easy to see where they terminated, we were constantly obliged to keep a sharp look-out, so as not to be compelled to retrace our steps, in consequence of arriving at the edge of one, at some distance from either extremity. Ainslie was our leader from the Grand Plateau to the region of the Grands Mulets, and very cool

and careful he showed himself; as we wandered down those long expanses of snow, which stretch away from the western foot of the Dôme de Gouté. From the time that we were about on a level with the Grands Mulets to the hour which saw us fairly on the Glacier des Bossons, many changes took place in our relative positions: for we were obliged to untie ourselves and go separate from time to time, in consequence of the complicated nature of the fissures in the ice, and the steep though short slopes which once or twice came in our path. At this time too we had not come to an unanimous decision as to whether we should adopt the Chamounix route, and cross the Glacier des Bossons from the Grands Mulets to the Pierre de l'Echelle; or attempt to go at once from the ice to the Montagne de la Côte. This latter mountain, a vast pine-clothed rocky promontory, rises up between the Glaciers des Bossons and Taconnay, on which we now stood. In the last century it was by the Montagne de la Côte that attempts were made to gain the summit of Mont Blanc; and De Saussure took this route when he ascended. For many years this track has been abandoned

in consequence of the difficulty of getting from the mountain to the glacier. That part of a glacier which skirts a mountain is always contorted into shapeless masses, and this effect had been produced to a greater degree than usual throughout the space immediately at our feet. The Glaciers des Bossons and Taconnay were here intersected with awkward fissures, and as we approached their junction, this rugged character became more and more striking; our eyes therefore glanced rapidly round, seeking the route that offered the fewest obstructions. Ainslie at this moment was leader, the rope being attached to his waist and connected with the remainder of the party. We had just arrived at the top of a perpendicular dip in the glacier surmounted by projecting snow. He approached the edge with the intention of reconnoitring, but his feet were upon smooth ice and instantly slipped from under him. He was, however, held up by the rope and gradually lowered until he arrived in soft snow thirty feet beneath. It was proposed to lower the party one at a time by means of the rope, but then for a moment the question arose as to who should be left

last to come down alone. No one was willing to yield this post of honour, and when Ainslie told us that there was plenty of soft snow at the bottom, all determined to enjoy the fun of a slide and a jump, and completed the descent more or less successfully: Kennedy, however, did not make a very good start, and pitching head-foremost, came rolling down over and over several yards in the snow, and contributed greatly to the general amusement of the party.

It was about five o'clock when we arrived at a point situated on the edge of the Glaciers des Bossons and Taconnay, and only a few hundred yards from the summit of the Montagne de la Côte, which was just below us. We first went in the direction of terra firma, but in each attempt to gain it, were brought up by enormous and impassable crevasses. We next tried to mount the Glacier des Bossons, but here again we were effectually stopped by similar obstacles. Upwards of an hour was thus spent, and, after many fruitless attempts, we found we had made no progress.

It wanted but an hour of sunset, an hour that would be fully needed for crossing the

glacier even should we be so fortunate as to discover a passage, while, if unsuccessful in our attempt, we should be forced either to retrace our steps, and take up our quarters on the Grands Mulets, or pass the night on the ice without any shelter. This would have been very disagreeable, though not dangerous to our party, for none of us were fatigued, and therefore we should have been able to keep ourselves warm by exercise, until the sun rose once more to cheer us on our way. Happily, however, we made an attempt a little higher up, when Hudson and C. Smyth, with rope attached and axe in hand, went forward, and with great skill and determination literally forced a passage, among bridges of snow, and over ridges and crags of ice: the rest of us followed; and in two or three minutes we were all standing on the Glacier des Bossons, leaving the most difficult crevasses in our rear. The passage from the Glacier de Tacconnay to that of Des Bossons was effected. We now walked at a quick pace directly across the glacier, and easily avoided the numerous chasms which appeared on all sides. We were roped together in the manner already de-

scribed, so as to avoid the possibility of an accident in case of a slip. This precaution was quite necessary, for when we were crossing a narrow ridge of ice between the crevasses, one of our party, who happened to be second in the line, suddenly disappeared in the crevasses to our right. As Hudson was first, he had for the moment more than his proper share of the weight to support; but quickly recovering himself, he quickly disengaged his head and shoulders from the strap to which the rope was attached, and gazed down into the azure vault. The third in our line instantly drew the rope tight, and dropped with one knee on the snow. The jerk dragged his hand eight or ten inches through the soft surface, but receiving without delay the ready support of those behind, and finding that Hudson relieved him of half the tension, he easily kept his position.

In the meantime we were in some anxiety, for although we felt his weight, we knew not whether some injury might not have been sustained in the fall. For a second or two we listened breathlessly to the sounds of the falling axe as it rebounded from side to side.

But there was no cause for anxiety. The rope was tough, and those above knew that they could extricate a single individual. Our friend, perfectly calm and collected, desired us to lower him a couple of feet, that he might obtain standing room on a ledge of ice. While we were on the point of complying with his request, he changed his tactics, and told us to raise him about a yard, this accomplished, he was enabled to rest his feet on a projecting block of ice, and lean his back against the opposite side. A hache was then handed to him, in lieu of that which he lost in the fall, and putting his feet into the steps which he cut, he was enabled with the help of our trusty rope to regain the surface in safety. Our friend appeared in no degree disconcerted by the incident. Indeed, so suddenly had it occurred, that the first disagreeable sensation on receiving a check to his downward progress arose, not from the terrors of his position, but from the fact that his dark green spectacles had descended from their proper position, and were hanging unsecurely on the tip of his nose. When these were readjusted to his satisfaction, he then began to contemplate at leisure the

novel situation in which he found himself. A few feet above him, the light of day found feeble entrance through the drifted snow, with which it was partly covered. And some dozen feet beneath the hard polished walls of ice, here and there relieved by the icicles suspended from the cavern's roof, closed in deepest azure. Our friend had been doubtless thinking of his supper at Chamounix, instead of minding his footsteps, and had we not been tied together, he might have had a serious fall. If persons will go on wool-gathering or dreaming of future prospects, instead of attending to present duties, they must not be surprised if they fall into difficulties sometimes — and they are lucky fellows, indeed, if they always have friends to help them out of them.

This incident delayed us about ten minutes, and then, with a general feeling of thankfulness that in crossing the Glacier des Bossons we had not neglected our usual precautions, and that they had proved efficient in this emergency, we started once more for the edge of the glacier.

We had now some splendid views, as the mists which partially obscured them opened



or lifted from time to time. Above this thin veil of clouds there was still the same glorious deep blue sky against which the Dôme du Gouté, Monts Maudits, and the Aiguille du Midi especially, were portrayed in fine relief. Add to this the setting sun, which at this hour caused these vast peaks of mixed snow and rock to glow with the rich rose colour, so vividly impressed upon the memories of all who are familiar with Alpine scenes, and consider the wild solitude of the ice-bound regions where wandered our little caravan. Let the reader picture to himself this happy combination, glance upwards as the fleecy drapery once more rolls off, and he will form but a faint idea of the thrilling and gorgeous spectacle which was there revealed. Time pressed, however, and we hastened across the ice: a few minutes brought us to the edge of the glacier. This was, of course, much broken up from its contiguity to the mountain, and a few steps had at times to be cut in huge blocks of ice over which our route lay. We could only keep our balance by touching the adjacent wall of ice which reared itself to our right; but after one or two easy springs, with no

little satisfaction to ourselves, we once more landed upon hard solid rocks, with nothing in the shape of snow or ice between us and the valley 5000 feet below.

It was about seven o'clock, and the full light of day was disappearing, though it was not dusk. We passed the Pierre de l'Echelle, which is at the foot of the Aiguille du Midi, and under which the Chamounix guides leave from year to year the ladder used by them in crossing some of the crevasses of the Glacier des Bossons. We descended the right bank of this glacier very rapidly for an hour in hopes of reaching the valley. How valuable now was every moment we could call our own ! We hurried on, leaping from rock to rock, clearing the mountain streamlets with unchecked speed, and flying over every obstacle that opposed our progress. While a single ray of light remained, our cry still was "onwards, onwards, and Chamounix is gained." But this headlong course could not last; our energies were unexhausted, but against the approach of darkness it was impossible to contend. The last lingering rays had long since departed from the summits of the moun-

tains, the shades of evening had closed around, and as the dusky mantle of night gradually enveloped surrounding objects, our pace slackened, our step became less certain, and soon we cautiously advanced with no other beacons than the glimmering lights in the distant village of Chamounix. After crossing some mountain streams we reached, though not without difficulty, the borders of civilisation. But owing to the darkness of the pine woods, we lost all traces of a path and wandered on almost at random. Some hay chalets belonging to the peasants were passed, and we hoped to find at least one human being amongst them who would undertake to guide us to the village. But all were deserted; for so little are these simple people in fear of robbers, that they leave their property upon the mountain sides entirely unprotected. A few goats gave signs of life by their continuous bleating, and this was the only answer to our repeated knocks and shouts. As we had little chance of a hospitable reception from them, we turned away, and again, but without success, attempted to gain the valley at our feet. Here we were at a complete standstill, not an hour's distance

from half-a-dozen good hotels, and only some few hundred feet above the valley: both, however, seemed unattainable. We called a halt in the wood and held a council of war. Further progress under the circumstances was deemed unadvisable by three of the party. It was past nine o'clock; we were all of us more or less sleepy from the day's fatigue, and making a virtue of necessity, stretched ourselves upon the hard earth, until dawn. Neither Hudson nor Ainslie were, however, disposed to give up all hope of a hot supper and comfortable bed at the Hotel d'Angleterre; so one shouldering his hache, and the other his ash-pole, the two again sallied forth on a voyage of discovery. But so many obstacles rendered formidable by the darkness of the night opposed their further descent, that, unwillingly, they retraced their steps, and joined the trio, who, having supped with Duke Humphrey, were endeavouring to silence the demands of an empty stomach. But this was no easy matter, for the mind would recur to the nine o'clock table d'hôte at Chamounix, which we had just contrived to miss, and to the satisfaction with which our friends were undoubtedly regaling themselves

on champagne and chamois at Jean Tairraz's hospitable board. Not quite satisfied with our quarters, and having in vain searched our knapsacks for a stray lucifer with a view to a bonfire, we adjourned to a hay chalet which two of our party had discovered, and on removing a prop from the door, we found to our delight a soft bed of fresh dry hay. Taking off our wet boots, we buried ourselves in the garnered produce of the mountain's side, and almost before we had time for congratulation on our good fortune, fell fast asleep. Many silent hours passed swiftly by before a stir was made in our band of five. The sun had already risen some time when the call was given at half past five to rise and pursue our way to Chamounix. The luxuries of a warm bath and clean linen, to say nothing of a substantial breakfast, were too alluring a vision to allow of any relapse into a second slumber. We made a hasty toilet, which consisted simply in putting on our half-dry boots, and washing our faces and hands in a neighbouring stream, and then, without any difficulty, we regained the path a few yards below the chalet and descended in safety to Chamounix.

So ended our adventure. No congratulatory crowds of guides and friends came out to meet us and to welcome us to Chamounix. No triumphal procession was granted to celebrate our victory over the proud monarch. The cannons in the yard of the Hotel de Londres, which peal forth their loud salutes to greet the return of successful adventurers, were silent. Nor did the table overflow with the veritable champagne de Mont Blanc, which, in accordance with time-honoured custom, is usually provided by the generous hospitality of the landlord. Unnoticed as any other travellers might be, we crossed the wooden bridge. Crowds there were assembled in the narrow street engaged in busy converse, but of this we were not the theme. A report, indeed, was getting rife that certain Englishmen had started two days before from St. Gervais, and had fixed upon the summit of Mont Blanc as the goal of their ambition. Besides this, too, a waiter, with a soul above his station, had, on the previous day, when looking through the telescope of the hotel, seen five black spots, having the appearance of humanity, moving over the surface of the Calotte, and within a

couple of hundred yards of the actual summit. This discovery he had duly reported, but an announcement so extraordinary met with no credit. Either the waiter had taken an extra glass of wine, or some peculiar species of animalculæ were wandering over the lenses of the telescope, or, perhaps, some strange creatures from foreign parts had strayed from their right latitude, and were roving amid the solitudes of the glaciers. However, no supposition could be more absurd than that a small party of Englishmen should have actually ascended from some other point,—that they should have overcome the difficulties of the route, — and finally, without guides, without a ladder, and without a knowledge of the path usually pursued, have arrived at Chamounix.

How determined are the Chamounix guides to cause an ascent without their assistance to be regarded as impracticable, may be gathered from the fact that to a question upon the point recently put to them by a friend of Smyth's, they replied, with an expressive shrug, "Eh, Monsieur, c'est tout-à-fait impossible!" The day after our arrival, our friend the Rev. William Templer, with the stipulated number of guides,

made the ascent. It was highly satisfactory to watch him from the Breven as he toiled up the steep slope of snow above the Grands Mulets continually in his necessarily zig-zag climb, crossing and recrossing our trail, which in its straight and directly downward course was plainly perceptible. As he followed our track he was much amused by the observations which the guides made relative to the mad Englishmen, who "knew nothing and feared less," and had passed over the same spots two days previously; and on his arrival at the summit he felt an additional glow of satisfaction when he was there welcomed by the still fresh traces of those friends, who, on his departure for the ascent not many hours before, had wished him "Bon voyage."

In instituting a brief comparison between the old route and the one which we pursued, it may be mentioned that St. Gervais is about 2600 feet above the sea, and Chamounix 900 feet higher. The Grands Mulets, where the first night is passed, is 10,000 feet, and our stone hut at the foot of the Aiguille between 9000 and 10,000 feet above the level of the



sea. Six hours, exclusive of halts, is ample time to allow between St. Gervais and the hut, and thence to the summit of Mont Blanc, we found that eight hours thirty-five minutes were required. There are no crevasses to be crossed until the Chamounix route is gained on the Grand Plateau, and scarcely any glacier walking until the morning's climb has carried the traveller to the summit of the Aiguille du Gouté, a height of 13,000 feet. Six hours' mounting is considered good work from Chamounix to the Grands Mulets, and the Rev. W. Templer, who is a remarkably fast climber, occupied nine hours in ascending thence to the highest point of Mont Blanc, although he had the great advantage of seeing our footprints on the snow. These particulars will enable every one to decide which route is preferable in point of duration and difficulty.

If the lover of mountain scenery prepare with sufficient forethought, if his skies be as serene as those that smiled on us, if the harmonious temper of his party reign as unbroken, as in our little band; then will he never regret the impulse that led him to seek

amid the glacier-fields of Mont Blanc, a test of energy and perseverance. If too, our narrative shed any light upon his path, then will our remuneration be more ample even than that of a guide at Chamounix.

## N O T E S.

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### GUIDE SYSTEM.

THE following extracts from Mr. Eustace Anderson's book, "Chamouni and Mont Blanc," are illustrative of the guide-system. Mr. Anderson writes thus:—

"After breakfast I went with Mr. Templer to the chief guide, and demanded guides for the ascent of Mont Blanc. He called over the names of eight who ranged themselves for our inspection, when we ascertained that only two had been to the summit, and remonstrated, pointing out that we ought to have at least four who had been there, but all to no purpose. We then said we should like to take two more experienced guides, and requested to be allowed to engage Victor and Jean Tairraz. No! this could not be allowed; if we wanted more guides, we must take them as they came on the roll; which we declined doing. . . . . We found, upon inquiry, that the penalty upon a guide for disobeying the rules was a fine or two days' imprisonment; and as we promised to pay any fine that might be imposed, Victor said he would run the risk of imprisonment. "If," said he, "I was imprisoned for being a thief, I might be ashamed, but I do not think it any shame to be imprisoned for going up Mont Blanc, and I

will go with you, gentlemen." We assured him we would, if possible, go to prison with him; at any rate, that we would escort him out of the village, and also make a friendly call and have a bottle of wine with him; and this important point being settled, we agreed to take Victor, his brother Jean, and eight more guides, which we considered sufficient. . . . Victor was after our departure fined twenty-five francs, in addition to which he had to pay twenty-five francs' expenses.

"Since my return to England an eminent geologist related to me, that whilst exploring the mountain near Chamouni last autumn, he wished to employ an old man, formerly on the roll of guides, who was himself a collector of fossils and minerals, knew every spot where they were to be found, and must therefore prove an invaluable companion to assist in any researches he wished to make; but that he was compelled to employ a guide on the roll who knew nothing about the matter, and was not even allowed to take the old man in addition, unless upon the understanding that he was not to pay him any thing! Such regulations are so absurd as scarcely to require comment."

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## SECOND ASCENT FROM ST. GERVAIS.

In a letter received from one of these gentlemen after our return to England, the following passage occurs:—

"Chalets of Breuil,  
"Sept. 2nd, 1855.

"My dear Mr. K.

" . . . . I take this opportunity of informing you of my successful ascent of Mont Blanc from St. Gervais on Friday and Saturday, the 24th and 25th of August.

"On the morning of our leaving Geneva, Mr. Hudson presented us with a guide, a chamois hunter of the name of Octenier, who had been on the summit five times. He was a first-rate fellow, and could be trusted with any thing, even our lives. On Thursday we took a practice walk of about twelve hours with him, across the glacier de Bionassay and some of the hills; and finding we got on better than we expected, we determined to start for Mont Blanc the following morning from Mont Joli Hotel St. Gervais. We left at 8 A. M. with three guides and five porters, carrying all our provisions. The walk to the Pavilion was very fatiguing, as the sun was desperately hot, and my friend Mr. Darley in consequence got a very severe headache, which detained us for a short time at the Pavilion. But he soon got better, and we started off again, and arrived at your sleeping place at six o'clock; there he got ill again, and said it would be better for me to go on without him; so with much regret I left him, and proceeded up the mountain with two guides and three porters, having left one guide with Mr. Darley, and a porter; another porter descended.

"I reached about three-fourths way up the Aiguille du Gouté, when it became too dark for us to go any

further; so we turned in under a projecting rock for the night, levelled our bed, and built a small wall round us to prevent us from rolling down the cliff in our sleep. We packed ourselves very closely to keep the heat among us, which was rather difficult, as the thermometer was below freezing and nothing but a blanket over us.

“ We started next morning at 4.30, and reached the Grand Plateau at 8.0, and the summit of Mont Blanc at twelve at noon. The ascent was a little more difficult than usual, the snow being very soft, and we sank nearly to our knees at every step. We had a beautiful view of all the Alps, but could not see Italy, as there was a very peculiar dark blue colour in the sky over it, which is very bad for viewing distant objects.

“ After remaining about a quarter of an hour on the top, which I did without finding the slightest difficulty of breathing, we descended on to the Grand Plateau very fast, but not *en glissade*, as the snow would not allow us. We then commenced, in my opinion, the most difficult part of the journey, the ascension of the Dome du Gouté, and to increase the unpleasantness of it, I got very sleepy, so would have given any thing to have slept there, but would not be allowed of course. We reached the Pavilion (where we slept for the night) at 11 P. M., having walked about eighteen hours that day.

“ We gave our chief guide Octenier fifty francs, the others different sums under that, which we left to him to arrange. It cost us each about 4*l.*, which

appears to me very little, and the ascent well worth the money.

"I made some observations with a common centigrade thermometer, which M. Rosset lent me. They can only be regarded approximately, but even so may be interesting to you.

"Very truly yours,

"ROBERT REEVES."

*Table of Temperature: Fahrenheit Scale.*

|          |                                          | Noon.        | Sun.               | Shade.             |
|----------|------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Aug. 24. | Pavilion - - -                           | 12.0         | 96 $\frac{1}{2}$ ° | 66 $\frac{1}{2}$ ° |
| —        | After two hours' walk -                  | P. M.<br>3.0 | -                  | 47                 |
| —        | Cabin on Tête Rouge -                    | 5.30         | -                  | 52 $\frac{1}{2}$   |
| —        | My sleeping place on Aiguille du Gouté - | 9.0          | -                  | 41 $\frac{3}{4}$   |
|          |                                          | A. M.        |                    |                    |
| Aug. 25. | " " -                                    | 4.30         | -                  | 33                 |
| —        | Dome du Gouté -                          | 7.0          | -                  | 28 $\frac{1}{2}$   |
| —        | Grand Plateau -                          | 8.0          | -                  | 38                 |
| —        | Col des Monts Maudits -                  | 10.0         | 37                 |                    |
| —        | Summit of Mont Blanc -                   | 12.0         | 28                 |                    |

THE END.

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# A CATALOGUE OF NEW WORKS IN GENERAL LITERATURE,

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